

# Elegy for Aunt Kate: A Triptych

## POETRY

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I.

The fear of death was spoon-fed to me—  
the drear of black velvet drapes  
over glossy wood coffins, heartbeats I swallowed  
but never digested. Instead, I was  
haunted by the wandering ghost of a question—  
What does it mean when your flesh turns  
pale and your chest beats with only late autumn  
bare branches? They say death is ugly,  
for the frail, filled with hoarse cries for mercy, clammy  
palms—clenched, holding a god who looks up  
with disdain. Still, she lived to  
explore the bills of toucans and frost  
the tips of mountains, and I bet her funeral will tickle  
the church floors as they creak with abandonment,  
as we steep  
in the liquor of mourning. I bet the pews will soften  
to splintering maple, poking through mauve  
carpet—long-faded, exposing patches of what's beneath.

II.

The last time I went to church, the harp strings trembled  
as the thurible swung like a brass pendulum. Sweet  
smoke rose into the air with desperate prayer, icicles  
dripping onto beams of stained-glass light. I watched  
orange and blue and red sting my breath as the deep  
granite pillars reached through clouds to touch Heaven  
with the holy molasses of song—yet as we sung, we  
descended  
into remorse, devotion. She was silent.

III.

At the funeral, Death was the only one  
who looked pretty in black, Her laughter looping  
through the hearth's crackling tinder-like licorice. And after  
I confessed into the delirious amber sky, my palms—  
clammy, clenched, nails digging into  
god with the sweat of anguish—  
felt your heartbeat unfasten, really  
unfasten, like a tooth from the church's mouth. Soon  
swallowed, but never digested. ■